

To: Sarah Apperley <sapperley@doc.govt.nz>
Cc: s9(2)(a)
Subject: Kahler Painting Assessment
Importance: High

Kia ora Sarah,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback around a significance assessment of the Kahler painting.

Please find attached a brief document that can provide some insight.

Do let us know if you see any errors or would like any changes.

9(2)(a)



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Significance Assessment

Prepared by [REDACTED] 9(2)(a)

[REDACTED] 9(2)(a) HPFS
Solutions

Artist: Herr Carl Kahler (b. 1855 – 1906)

Artwork: *The White Terraces*, c. 1889, oil on canvas

Current Location: Chateau Tongariro Chattels

Condition: Worn and declining, the artwork is in a state of active deterioration



The heritage listed Chateau Tongariro has long been home to artist Herr Carl Kahler's *The White Terraces*. Austrian born Carl Kahler trained professionally in Munich, Paris, and Italy. He established a successful portrait practice upon his arrival to Melbourne in 1885.¹ This artwork reflects the now lost but well documented attraction Te Tarata (Pink and White Terraces). During the 1886 eruption of Mount Tarawera, situated on the shores of Lake Rotomahana, the terraces were said to be destroyed.² As a candidate for the 8th Wonder of the World, the Pink and White Terraces attracted global visitation throughout the mid 1800s.³ For working artists at the time, early tourism was a large source of revenue. Local and foreign artists, including the likes of Charles Bloomfield and John Hoyte, captured the site pre-eruption in copious landscape paintings.⁴

Kahler and Bloomfield's reproduction of the terraces aided in generating a piece of New Zealand's folk myth: 'the legend of the lost terraces.'⁵ Many theories (from scientists and in popular culture) have surfaced in the last two centuries that suggest the terraces were buried and have in fact re-emerged various times throughout history. This narrative continues to have modern day significance as reports of these alleged discoveries still receive vast attention through online media platforms. Further to this, local tourism continues to offer a round trip through the Waimangu Volcanic Valley. This trip "shares the origins of tourism in New Zealand".⁶ Kahler's depiction captures what many topographical paintings attempt, the successful documentation of lost places and their history. The access to different interpretations of this lost site enables a modern day allows scientists and researchers to gain a more holistic view of a debated aspect of our geological history.

What sets Kahler's artwork apart, and consequently elevates its social significance, is its prominent history at the Chateau Tongariro. While the artworks acquisition history remains ambiguous, it has been hanging in the Chateau Ground Lobby since late 1975.⁷ A painting by Kahler with the same title went for \$400 at a Melbourne auction in May 1975.⁸ Three months later, Kahler's large painting graced the front page of the Southland Times, and it is without debate the artwork this report centres on. The painting measures at W 2100mm x H 2700mm (including frame) – its sheer scale intensifying the monumentality of Kahler's chosen subject. The Chateau is a category one historic place on the Heritage List. According to Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, category 1 historic places "are of special or outstanding historical or cultural significance or value".⁹ Kahler's artwork has become a key part of the Chateau's history, to the point where some denote it holds the same value as the building. When

¹ National Portrait Gallery. "Carl Kahler". Accessed 28 November 2023.

<https://www.portrait.gov.au/people/carl-kahler-1855>

² Rotorua Museum. "The Pink and White Terraces". Accessed 28 November 2023.

<https://www.rotorua-museum.co.nz/discover/the-pink-white-terraces>

³Ibid.

⁴ Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Collections Online. "White Terraces". Accessed 28 November 2023.

<https://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/object/42254>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Waimangu Volcanic Valley. "The Round Trip". Accessed 28 November 2023.

<https://www.waimangu.co.nz/experiences/round-trip>

⁷ Kim Knight, "Chateau Tongariro is closed – who gets its historic art treasure?". *New Zealand Herald*, August 23, 2023.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga. "New Zealand Heritage List Rārangi Kōrero". Accessed 28 November 2023.

<https://www.heritage.org.nz/places#thelist>

interviewed by the New Zealand Herald Ben Plumbly from Auckland auction house Art + Object makes two remarks that reaffirm this idea:

- “Have you ever been to the Chateau? There are effectively two views. One is the large window straight out to Mt Ngauruhoe. The other is, basically, that painting”.¹⁰
- “I would argue it is of national significance, because of history and connection to what is one of New Zealand’s most iconic bits of architecture”.¹¹

There is conflicting information regarding when and how Kahler rendered his final image of the terraces. Ship arrival documentation suggests a man with the name C. Kahler was in Aotearoa prior to the 1885 eruption, but whether he ever saw them with his own eyes is contestable. Some believe he only saw photographs, but the truth remains uncertain. Kahler is better known for a different oil painting titled *My Wife’s Lovers* (featuring 42 angora cats as it’s subject). This artwork last sold in 2015 for an \$826,000USD (\$1.3 million NZD at today’s exchange rate) at Sotheby’s in New York City.¹² It has been called the most famous painting of cats ever made. From this standpoint, Kahler is an artist of international renown. Ben Plumbly suggests that estimating *The White Terraces* monetary value is “utter guesswork”.¹³ Professional estimates suggest it could be worth upwards of \$250,000.¹⁴

The aesthetic value of his artworks was much debated in past and recent art historical critique. Various early 1890s newspaper articles commend the artists technical abilities and personality traits “Kahler is not only a genius, but an even greater rarity – an artist not overweeningly vain”.¹⁵ Some claimed he was an ‘unrivalled colourist’, who was far more modest in approach than our local artists of the time.¹⁶ Others oppose this positive critique, regarding Kahler’s attempt to reproduce the scene of *The White Terraces* (with perhaps a photograph as his only reference) as far less successful than the ‘charming’ yet realistic interpretations by English-born Charles Bloomfield (whose paintings of this subject recently sold for \$90,000 NZD).¹⁷ Bloomfield produced hundreds of paintings that are almost indistinguishable from one another, Kahler did not. Plumbly goes as far as to say that this is an irreplaceable artwork, “there is not another painting like it”.¹⁸ The mass production of the subject was not uncommon, but rarity of scale and depiction was.

Herr Carl Kahler’s artwork is of historical, social, geological, scientific, and commercial significance. The findings laid out in this assessment suggest the significance of *The White Terraces* is permanently tied to its history and uncertain future of the Chateau, the establishment of tourism in Aotearoa and centuries of rich personal histories.

¹⁰ Kim Knight, *Chateau*, 2023.

¹¹ Ibid,

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ “A German Artist in Auckland”, *Observer*, November 8, 1890.

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/TO18901108.2.31.2>

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ “Auckland Society of Arts. Formal Opening of the Exhibition”. *New Zealand Herald*, March 5, 1891.

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18910305.2.33>

¹⁸ Kim Knight, *Chateau*, 2023.

References

“A German Artist in Auckland”, *Observer, Volume X*, November 8, 1890.

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/TO18901108.2.31.2>

“Auckland Society of Arts. Formal Opening of the Exhibition”. *New Zealand Herald*, March 5, 1891.

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<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/483676/chateau-tongariro-closes-its-doors-permanently-today>

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<https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/chateau-tongariro-is-closed-what-next-for-its-carl-kahler-white-terraces-art-treasure>

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<https://www.portrait.gov.au/people/carl-kahler-1855>

International Art Centre. “Charles Bloomfield – Pink and White Terraces – a pair”. Accessed 28 November 2023.

<https://www.portrait.gov.au/people/carl-kahler-1855>

Rotorua Museum. “The Pink and White Terraces”. Accessed 28 November 2023.

<https://www.rotoruamuseum.co.nz/discover/the-pink-white-terraces>

Waimangu Volcanic Valley. “The Round Trip”. Accessed 28 November 2023.

<https://www.waimangu.co.nz/experiences/round-trip>

Condition Report

By: [REDACTED] 9(2)(a)

Oil painting on cotton canvas.

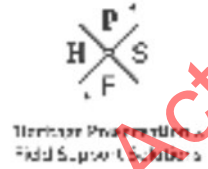
Date of the report: 13 Sep 2023

Place of the report: Chateau Tongariro

Client: Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai

Objectives and context of the condition report: Identify the condition of the painting and factors of deterioration.

Recommend long-term storage options.



Identification

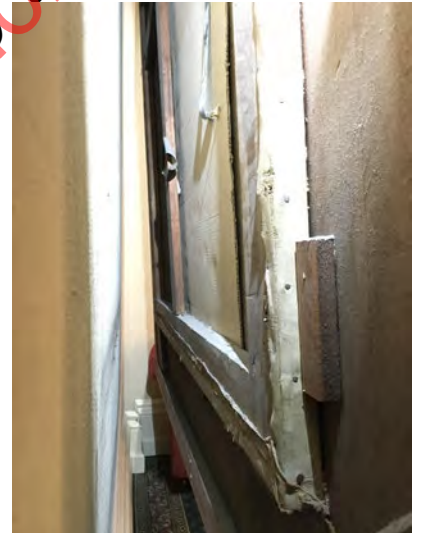
Title / Designation: ***The White Terrace of Lake Erotomania Painted Before Being Buried by The Eruption Of Mt Tarrawarra 1886 (Painting)***

Author: Carl Kahler

Date of creation: Pre 1886

Material, technique: Oil paint, canvas, wood, plaster

Number of items: 1



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Photos and Damages





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Final Observations

General comments:

The hotel was closed and the heating was turned off, the staff noted the painting had sagged considerably after this. They turned the heating back on and it tightened up slightly.

Condition consistent with previous condition report.

Also noted: paint transfer of blue paint, paint loss, heavy dust, the varnish is discoloured, under sketch is visible, paint cracking throughout the surface, residues from food as reported by staff, abrasions and loss of paint along the bottom edge, varnish has pooled in some areas, appears to be natural resin varnish, the painted surface is largely smooth except white areas with thick clumps, fly spots, paint cracking and flaking but largely well adhered, very thin gesso layer which is contributing to the flaking, brass plate with the title has polish residue, fingerprints. The painting stretcher sits directly against the wall which pushes the original painting into the frame, and heavy dust on the reverse, cardboard has been inserted to prevent the sagging some time ago, canvas has been re-stretched at some point for restoration and re-sizing and has been visibly shortened, modern staples have been used to try to tighten the canvas, cardboard and duct tape used to try to tighten the canvas, can see where original nail holes were and where new nails were placed for a new size, cardboard has not been beneficial and has deformed the canvas at the bottom, most of the damage is at the bottom end where people have interacted with it, some paint loss at top right.

Frame: Loss of plaster, especially along the lower edge, some gold paint applied as a later restoration, loss of gold leafing, cracking in the surface of the plaster, and sticky residues on the frame exterior. Two large eye bolts on the frame are hung over L-shaped hooks that are embedded into the wall, not earthquake-proof and will jump off, textile wrap and cover over the front of the frame, hardwood frame, discolouration of the textile on the frame, the fluorescent down light has no UV filter.

The painting appears to have had a heavy-handed restoration possibly dating 1920s to 1950s. This has resulted in original paint loss when the varnish was removed and a thick application of new natural resin varnish. This appears to also have been the time when the canvas was re-sized and reduced onto a new stretcher. It was not stretched properly which has resulted in the sagging.

Painting can be created and stored, frame is stable. Environmental data suggests that the current location is best position for painting, minimal movement is ideal unless further treatment is conducted to consolidate the paint.

Recommended treatments:

Requires restoration, consolidation of flaking paint, and varnish cleaning. Re-stretching. Remove cardboard and clean reverse.

Other requirements:

Preventive conservation

Temperature: 18°C - 20°C (+/- 1°C /24h)

Relative humidity: 45% - 50% (+/- 5% /24h)

Maximal light exposure: 50 lux 50 lux (150000 lux.h/year)

Signature(s) of: [REDACTED] 9(2)(a)

[REDACTED] 9(2)(a)

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CHATEAU TONGARIRO



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CONDITION ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

14 NOVEMBER 2023

PREPARED BY:

9(2)(a)
9(2)(a)
9(2)(a)

PREPARED FOR:



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Field Support Solutions

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1.0 Introduction

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Construction of Chateau Tongariro c. 1929.
Source: Manawatu Heritage.



Introduction

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Chateau, Tongaririo - Tongariro National Park, N.Z.
Source: Auckland Libraries heritage Images
Collection.



Introduction

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2.0 Background

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Background

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Left wing of Grand Chateau indicated.
Source: <http://www.davidwallphoto.com>.



Background

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Background

Out of Scope

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3.0 Recommendations

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Recommendations

Out of Scope

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Recommendations

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Carl Kahler Painting

We recommend that the custodians familiarise themselves with the condition concerns that are outlined in the specific condition report for

Recommendations

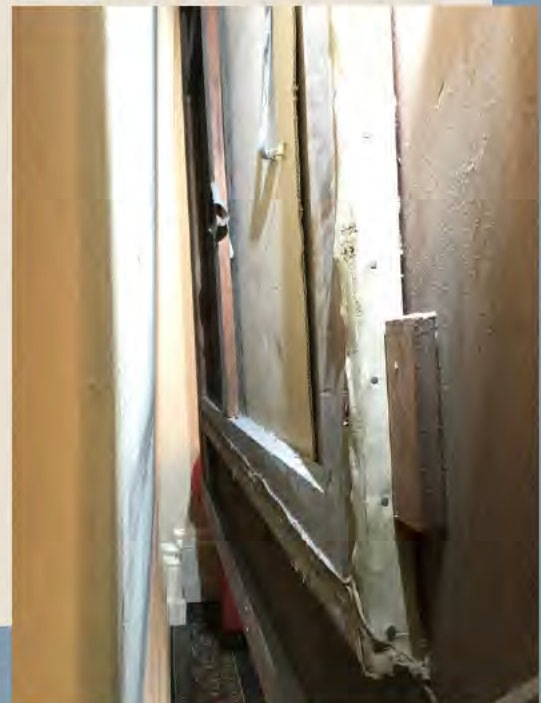
the painting before any interaction with the work. There is paint loss with cracking and flaking, varnish discolouration and surface residues from food and fly spots. The biggest risk to the painting is a large seismic event where damage to the painting could be caused by falling debris or the frame itself could be dislodged from the wall and suffer damage from the fall. Even small movements of the work could lead to further paint loss. Environmental factors such as temperature regulation are also influential on the stability of the painting, as evident by the drooping of the canvas. Security of the premises is a notable factor in regards to the painting as a work of national significance. We present two plans of action which rely on assessing the risks involved in moving the work:

Option 1: Consolidate lifting paint and leave in situ

1. Consolidate lifting paint or a facing applied
 2. Install a cover to protect the surface from dust and exposure
 3. Perform ongoing monitoring
- This would minimise the handling and reduce the stress on the canvas.

Option 2: Unframe painting and store in 6(c)

1. Consolidate lifting paint or a facing applied
 2. Lift down the frame onto the face and then remove frame
 3. Evaluate canvas wedges for re-tensioning
 4. Crate the painting separately to the frame and store both upright in the 6(c)
- This would reduce the risk of earthquake damage.



Recommendations

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Recommendations

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Recommendations

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Studio Overview


HPFS Solutions is a locally owned and operated conservation studio in Taranaki. In its seven year journey, the studio has grown to employ a team of heritage professionals led by [REDACTED] 9(2)(a) [REDACTED] and has expanded to purpose-built facilities based in Ngāmotu New Plymouth.


HPFS Solutions offers specialist conservation advice and treatment to preserve a range of objects and taonga for generations to come. The studio's philosophies centre around community, mātauranga Māori and the significance that objects and taonga hold.

Contact Details

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Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Whakapapa Village DOC staff and Chateau caretakers that provided access, support and extensive knowledge on the Chateau's operations. Also, to Sarah Apperley DOC Programme Manager Kaiwhakahaere Hōtaka.

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Appendix A

No.	Table of Items	Brand/Artist	Quantity	Item Description	Location	Dimensions
Framed Artworks						

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19



Carl Kahler

1

The White
Terrace of
Lake
Erotomania
Painted
Before Being
Buried by
The Eruption
Of Mt
Tarrawarra
1886

6(c)

W 2100mm x
H 2700mm

Out of Scope

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Appendix A



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Appendix B



Lux levels for artworks is recommended to be 150lux or less and 50 lux or less for sensitive works. UV levels are recommend to be below 75 micro watts/lumen. Readings that exceed these levels are highlighted in yellow below.

Environmental Readings for Items	LUX	UV (mW/cm ²)	Temp (°C)	RH (%)
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Out of Scope

Carl Kahler Painting	18.92	0.1	18	42
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